

2008 State of the City Speech

Mayor Mary Leas Stegall

What sets this city apart from other communities is not its continued growth but its “coming of age.” This “coming of age” is what I have seen since moving to Redding in 1992.

My first view of Redding was a year earlier in May 1991 and it was the same way many people first see our city – from a freeway.

We’d just come in from Reno on Highway 44 and I expected to see a flat, hot valley town. Instead it was a beautiful spring weekend and I was pleasantly surprised to see a city nestled in green and surrounded by tree-covered rolling hills. My husband, Bill, and I found our way to the river trail and enjoyed a wonderful walk at dusk. As we returned to our car we looked up and saw a full moon over Lassen Peak.

We were sold.

Bill and I made a choice to live in Redding and moved here nearly 16 years ago. We looked forward to living in a town surrounded by beautiful mountains with clean air, a low crime rate, and affordable housing. It didn't take long, however, to develop the impression that even with all these good things going for it, Redding was suffering from low self-esteem. And, I found myself feeling basically the same way about our city.

There were very few places within the city limits to show off to visitors. Certainly the river walk was beautiful and we had some lovely parks, but mostly we took friends and relatives outside Redding to "see the sights" -- Shasta Dam, Whiskeytown, Shasta Lake, Lassen Park ... the usual spots. I was also

struck by the fact that even our city seal highlights Mt. Shasta and Shasta Dam, neither of which is within the city limits.

Several years ago I began to detect a momentum in Redding to change things. Good things started happening that were changing, for the better, the way people were feeling about the city. Good things -- like the downtown demonstration blocks, Library Park improvements and Turtle Bay Exploration Park. Good things -- like the Lake Redding Bridge on Court Street, the new entry welcome signs, the new Civic Center and, of course, the Sundial Bridge.

All of these good things didn't go unnoticed by others either. As a result of all of these civic investments, Redding has been discovered. Redding's attractions have caught the eye of the media, resulting in 75 stories in various newspapers, magazines and other publications in the past year. The highlight was a major story in the Sacramento Bee noting the Sundial Bridge as one of the seven wonders of California. Letters of appreciation and admiration from out-of-town visitors are becoming more common.

More and more people are choosing to move here. More and more developers want to develop here. Redding is no longer suffering from a lack of self-esteem. It is growing into maturity. And I believe it is "coming of age." The decisions we make in the next few years will determine just how great our future can be.

We are faced with the challenges of maturity: We must continue to find ways to combine business-minded goals with civic-minded values to ensure that the city's prosperity goes hand-in-hand with the area's unsurpassed quality of life. Accomplishing both goals successfully makes up Redding's very foundation; and demonstrates the strength of this community.

I was born in Fresno and lived there for 40 years. I have seen my hometown go from being named an "All American" city in 1963 to a city that, since those glory days, is looked at by many as having done a lot wrong. The air quality is bad a good portion of the time, urban sprawl has destroyed a large amount of quality agricultural land, strip malls exist in abundance, the crime rate is high, and there has been almost no planning for open space. I don't want this to happen to Redding. I don't think any of us do.

Business and industry owners looking for a new home tell us they pay close attention to the following quality-of-life factors:

- Low crime rate
- Ratings of public schools
- Health facilities
- Housing availability
- Housing costs

Going by that list, Redding has a lot going for it. We have a low crime rate; excellent public schools, two fine medical centers and relatively affordable housing compared with other California cities.

We know Redding is going to continue to grow. The question is: How do we "come of age" in a way that protects the quality of life we have while accommodating those we know will want to come here?

A key to successful growth is the development of a sound economic plan to provide jobs that pay a livable wage; jobs that make it possible for our children to stay in Redding, buy a home and raise a

family. A sound economic plan needs to care about current city businesses as well as bring new, clean industry to our community.

One example is SECO Manufacturing Co., a longtime local survey equipment firm, which expanded its job base by 74 jobs utilizing City incentives and job credits. Another very visible example of the City helping existing businesses is Cascade Square. A partnership between the City, Redding Redevelopment Agency and Dr. Craig Kraffert saw the completion of this striking art deco-style commercial property at Placer and California streets in 2007. And across town, the city is working with business owners on Hilltop Drive to improve this highly visible corridor.

Two recent *new* business “success stories” are Southern Aluminum Finishing and Captive Aire – manufacturing companies that have chosen to expand their operations with plants in Redding. State Compensation Insurance Fund is just completing a new service center at Shasta View Drive and Highway 44. A brand new Kohl’s department store opened on Browning Street in November and a Trader Joe’s is planned nearby. To serve our senior population, The Vistas Assisted Living and Memory Care has been built on Hartnell Avenue and two other residential care facilities are in the works at Buenaventura Boulevard and Eureka Way and on Hilltop Drive near Lake Boulevard.

Still, Redding is competing with many other cities when trying to attract business and industry to our community. This is the premise behind the Stillwater Business Park, which will begin construction this spring. When it is complete, hopefully by the end of this year, the City of Redding will be able to offer more than 300 acres of “shovel-ready” land, complete with infrastructure, ready for industrial development. Surrounded by nearly 300 acres of open space, trails and lakes, Stillwater promises to stand as a jewel among a very limited number of opportunities for manufacturers ready to expand or relocate.

As we “come of age” we also need to care about a viable and safe downtown. In nearly every American town, the health of the community is proportional to the health of its downtown. Prospective businesses and potential new residents gauge a community's attractiveness in part on the vitality of its downtown. Downtowns that have a healthy mix of business, affordable and market rate housing, and other activities will greatly improve a city's capacity to draw and keep new business.

It is important to remember that Downtown Redding is the City's "heart," a focal point for our citizens' sense of community and a place with great ties to the region's economy and activities.

With private and public investment, some very exciting projects have been completed in downtown Redding such as Shasta College's Health Science Center, the opening of the Cascade Theatre and several successful new restaurants.

But there's plenty more to do.

The next major redevelopment project we look forward to is removal of the remainder of the Downtown Mall roof to be completed by next year. Many of us have been waiting for this to happen for years now. The three city blocks where the enclosed mall once stood will be transformed into a vibrant, open-air, pedestrian-friendly environment hosting public art, outdoor dining and a variety of community events.

Outside the heart of the city, we must utilize our very best planning efforts to ensure we don't forsake one area of commercial success for another.

We should carefully consider the proposed regional mall at Oasis and I-5. Important questions will have to be asked, including how and who will pay for the necessary infrastructure? What will happen to the area surrounding the Mt. Shasta Mall and what will happen to Dana Drive when a regional

mall goes in on I-5? We all have seen whole shopping centers shut down when new malls come into being. I have seen huge big box stores in a number of cities shut down in one spot only to open up a few blocks away, leaving terrible blight in their path. I don't want to see this happen to Redding.

Supporting public safety is another critical area of concern as we “come of age.” Just last year, the council voted to make use of grant funds to add two more police officers specifically to target drunken drivers. That paid off in 2007 with 1,010 DUI arrests – nearly double the 616 arrests of the year before and nearly triple the 395 in 2005. We also voted to add three new firefighter positions in the city’s two-year budget. We must reduce fire and police response times. In addition, we must construct a new police building.

The council has appropriated \$220,000 toward preliminary design needed for the new police facility. Much like its City Hall cousin before it was replaced by a new building in 2000, the current police station is leaky, overcrowded and ill-suited for a progressive police force in a growing city that has doubled in 30 years. Lack of space has caused interview rooms to be turned into storage units. Officers bump elbows in the cramped space available to write reports. And evidence lockers are literally overflowing in the 60-year-old building that once was a car dealership but has been home to our police department since 1977.

Our officers deserve better.

But I also think we need to realize that the crime rate is impacted by many other factors including availability of jobs, the availability of affordable housing, the quality of our cultural arts, schools, libraries and museums. All of these impact the city's sense of well-being.

And Redding has matured in all of these areas.

While other cities closed or reduced the offerings of their libraries, Redding and Shasta County threw open the doors to a beautiful new one last March. It's a warm feeling to see it filled with children and adults alike, many of whom are discovering a library for the first time. In fact, just a few weeks ago, 2,950 people visited the library on a single day – easily a record!

We have excellent schools and the city continues to work collaboratively with our local districts through a variety of partnerships and projects. One of our most successful endeavors continues to be a partnership developed with the Redding Police Department to have School Resource Officers on the campuses of the Shasta Union High School District, Redding School District, and the Enterprise Elementary School District. These officers work cooperatively with the school districts to help deter crime as well as help students develop a positive relationship with law enforcement.

The city has helped the Turtle Bay Exploration Park become a focal point for history and local culture as well as a popular destination for tourists. Big League Dreams has taken off in a way no one predicted, and we boast a state-of-the-art \$10 million all-weather soccer complex that is like no other in the state.

In fact, a front-page article in the San Francisco Chronicle touted the Redding Soccer Park project as farsighted and as a downright smart investment in youth sports, noting the payoff in dollars spent in the local economy. And one Redding resident (Randy Harmon) was so moved by his experience at the park he wrote a letter to the Record Searchlight, concluding: "It seems like a real win-win situation for the community and it was great to be a part of it."

Our network of trails continues to improve and the latest addition will connect Turtle Bay to a popular recreation area along the Sacramento River near North Bechelli Lane. Planning is underway in partnership with Gateway School District for a 10-acre neighborhood park and recreation center on Lake

Boulevard and another park near I-5 and Bechelli Lane.

The City of Redding has been criticized by some for focusing too much on projects like these, and not enough on our aging infrastructure. But I truly believe that these civic improvements serve us in three important ways:

1) They boost tourism, which strengthens local businesses and generates more sales tax to support essential community infrastructure such as public safety and well-maintained streets, 2) They create increased community pride and strengthen our sense of identity, and 3) They serve our own citizens, providing ongoing opportunities for family-oriented healthy activities.

However, balance is important and we are paying attention to our infrastructure needs. We have put more money into patching and paving streets in recent years. The current budget earmarks \$4.8 million a year for street maintenance, up from \$100,000 in 1995 and \$700,000 in 2006-07. We will, and must, keep looking for ways to increase funding to keep our roads well-maintained

Look around and you'll see a lot happening on Redding's streets and bridges and sidewalks.

A \$73 million project to replace the Cypress Avenue Bridge will expand it to six lanes, reducing congestion and making it safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Federal funds will pay for nearly 90 percent of the work, which should be complete by 2011.

Also underway is the much-needed widening of South Bonnyview Road to four lanes, providing sidewalks, improving drainage facilities and enhancing intersections. The \$16.8 million project utilizes state, federal and local funds and should be completed by November. Nearby, initial work has begun on the realignment of Churn Creek Road just north of its intersection with South Bonnyview Road. The addition of two lanes in each direction will reduce congestion and increase safety and help provide for

development in the area in the future.

On Hilltop Drive, the Highway 44 overpass is being widened, in part to prepare for the future Dana-to-Downtown on ramp. And a joint project between hoteliers and the Redding Redevelopment Agency is in place to add landscaped medians and put utilities underground.

We are meeting infrastructure needs in other areas as well. Projects in the works or completed during the past year include the replacement of two aging water tanks on Foothill Boulevard, expansion of the Buckeye Water Treatment Plant to double its capacity, and the installation of nearly two miles of 30-inch water main to serve North Redding. The city also completed construction of Well 23 off Airport Road near Knighton Road to address growth in the eastern portion of Redding.

Along with serving the traditional needs of its citizens with better streets, services and amenities, we must continue to look for ways to meet the growing cry to protect our finite natural resources. In fact, Redding has a proud record of promoting sustainability through a variety of programs, many spearheaded by its Electric Utility.

REU's Earth Advantage green building program has been a model of success. Since launching the program in 2005, REU has partnered with more than 15 residential builders and has seen more than 250 homes built to Earth Advantage standards, which are at least 20 percent more efficient than standard homes. And, some 400 more homes are in the pipeline. The city also has partnered with the Shasta Builder's Exchange on Agree Park, an affordable, green housing project. Agree Park stands for Affordable, Green, Residential, Energy Efficient. Complementing that is the Earth Advantage Resource Center at the Exchange's headquarters on Innsbruck Drive in Redding, showcasing the latest in energy efficient and resource-saving materials.

We all know the importance of air conditioning in Redding in the summertime. The city has used Thermal Energy Storage technology – in essence large ice cubes – as a cost-efficient way to cool buildings such as the Redding Library and the Redding Municipal Airport terminal. We plan to expand the program in 2008 to a wider audience. We've also utilized that summer sun to generate electricity through photovoltaic projects at the library and in conjunction with Turtle Bay Exploration Park.

In keeping with its commitment to using renewable energy sources as much as practical, the city has been utilizing 25 megawatts of electricity from a windmill farm in Washington – enough to power 20,000 homes. And we will add 10 more megawatts of renewable power from a biomass plant early this year.

Also, as a result of a trip Bill and I took to Italy this last fall, I discovered another way to reduce our carbon footprint and, at the same time, the cost of new police vehicles. Take a look. I'm just kidding chief!

Our city undoubtedly will face some serious economic challenges this year, as will most other cities and the state of California.

Costs for public retirement and health care have increased slightly for 2008. Our two primary sources of revenue – sales taxes and property taxes – are not as robust as in past years. And the future is uncertain.

City leadership already has taken steps to address this, revisiting our biennial budget and taking a cautious approach to spending. We are fortunate to have a strong General Fund reserve and a sound 10-year financial plan. We have been, and will continue to be, proactive in ensuring our good financial health.

Redding has come a long way since that day in 1991 when we first met. It has grown and matured and looked at itself in new ways. And I believe we are better for it.

One last word of caution. If Redding is to continue to grow and mature in a way that protects the quality of life we all value, Redding cannot do it alone. Regional planning is crucial. We don't live in a vacuum, and we can't build walls around our city. As a board member of the Regional Transportation Planning Agency, I'm well aware of the work being done on regional planning through Shasta Forward. The City has been a willing participant in early workshops. One of the interesting features is the regional blueprint process. It generates visualizations of what likely "will be" based on existing and anticipated trends and policies compared to what "could be," based on community-identified values and priorities. The computer doesn't tell us what is the right or wrong way to grow – that decision is up to us. But it will crunch the many variables that ultimately define the environment in which we live.

I am not naïve enough to think that all elected officials will agree on every detail of an effective regional plan. But that shouldn't keep us from trying. It's something we must do.

As Redding comes of age, let's be sure we continue to find ways to combine business-minded goals with civic-minded values. Let's ensure that someday Redding will be known as the best place to live in the United States because of our strong economy, cultural amenities, trails and open space, affordable housing and the natural beauty that surrounds us.

If we let those principles guide us, the state of our City will be very strong indeed.